

C. Remarks

This Preliminary Amendment is to submit a substitute specification to correct various typographical, grammatical and syntax errors to conform the text better with proper idiomatic English. Both the errors and the corrections are clear. A copy of the original specification, showing the changes made thereto, is attached.

No new matter has been added. Favorable consideration of the claims and expedient passage to issue are respectfully requested.

Applicant's undersigned attorney may be reached in our New York office by telephone at (212) 218-2100. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our below listed address.

Respectfully submitted,

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DESCRIPTION

GAS REPLACEMENT METHOD OF FUEL CELL, FUEL CELL SYSTEM
AND DEVICE FOR FUEL CELL SYSTEM

5

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to a gas replacement method ~~of in~~ a fuel cell system that ~~using~~ uses a gas such as hydrogen as ~~a~~ fuel, and
10 particularly relates to a gas replacement method, a fuel cell system and a device for the fuel cell system, which replace a gas other than the fuel in the fuel cell system with the fuel to fill ~~an~~ the inside of the fuel cell system with the fuel, which
15 is supplied from a fuel cartridge.

BACKGROUND ART

In recent years, damage to the environmental ~~destruction~~ has become a problem, and ~~a~~ clean energy
20 ~~which that~~ does not generate result in the production of harmful waste is required. Exhaustion of fossil fuels has also become a problem, and a new energy source is in demand. Meanwhile, in the electronics field, the amount of information that needs to be
25 processed continues to dramatically increases, ~~with~~ ~~which the information processing ability is~~ ~~dramatically enlarged, and~~ leading to the increase in

electric power consumption of the electronic equipments ~~tends to increase~~.

Thus, hydrogen, which is contained in water that is inexhaustible on ~~the earth~~ Earth, has a large
 5 chemical energy, and does not discharge harmful substances, ~~has~~ attracts ~~attracted~~ attention as an energy source. A fuel cell, which directly produces ~~an~~ electric energy, can ~~take out~~ extract a large
 amount of electric power with the highly efficient
 10 use of hydrogen, and therefore, ~~can be application to~~ used in automobiles and portable electronic devices, such as notebook computers, mobile phones and digital camcorders, is being advanced.

A so-called fuel cell, which ~~takes out~~
 15 ~~an~~ extracts electrical energy from hydrogen, has a hydrogen electrode to which hydrogen is supplied and an oxidation electrode to which oxygen is supplied, separates hydrogen atoms into electrons and protons by a catalytic reaction in the hydrogen electrode, ~~and t.~~
 20 ~~and t.~~ The protons pass through an electrolyte membrane, and then reach the oxidation electrode, and react with oxygen by a catalytic reaction, whereby water ~~is generates~~ generated. Along with the
water, and in this process, the flow of electrons,
 25 namely electric power, is also generated.

Unlike the conventional batteries, ~~in the fuel cell, there is~~ fuel cells do no need ~~of an~~ electric

charge, and it is possible to generate electric power immediately by only replenishing it with fuel after the fuel is used up, which is convenient for a long-term use of a device.

5 A fuel cell system that supplies fuel into the fuel cell system from a fuel cartridge is described, for example, in Japanese Patent Application Laid-open No. 2002-158022.

10 DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

As described above, the fuel cell can ~~take~~
~~outproduce an electrical~~ energy by ~~being replenishing~~
~~replenished it~~ with ~~a~~ fuel at any time ~~at and any~~
 place, but has to use a gas, such as hydrogen, unlike
 15 ~~the a~~ conventional secondary battery.

~~On replacement of a~~When a fuel cartridge is
~~replaced,~~ it is necessary to temporarily remove ~~the~~
~~fuel cartridge it~~ from a fuel cell system ~~temporarily.~~
 As a result, ~~and on this occasion,~~ atmospheric air ~~in~~
 20 ~~the atmosphere~~ will enter the fuel cell system. ~~At~~
~~that time,~~ leading to a significantly reduction in
 the output of the fuel cell ~~significantly reduces, or~~
~~in.~~ In many cases, the reaction ~~of in~~ the fuel cell
 stops. Accordingly, it is essential to replace the
 25 gas inside the fuel cell system with the fuel gas at
 the time of fuel replacement.

~~In addition to the time of replacement of a~~

~~fuel cartridge, g~~Gas replacement is also necessary when any gas other than the fuel gas enters a fuel cell system.

When a fuel cell system is not of a cartridge
5 type, but is provided integrally with a fuel tank, there is a possibility that any gas other than ~~a~~the fuel may enter the fuel cell system.

The present invention has been accomplished in view of such background art, and it is, therefore, an
10 object of the present invention to provide a simpler gas replacement method, fuel cell system and device for the fuel cell system to replace the gas other than fuel, which enters the fuel cell system that is supplied with ~~a~~the fuel from a fuel cartridge or a
15 fuel tank provided in the fuel cell system, with the fuel gas. In particular, the present invention provides an automatic gas replacement method, fuel cell system and a device for the fuel cell system, ~~by~~ which makes it unnecessary for the user ~~does not need~~
20 to manually perform the gas replacement operation-
~~manually.~~

Namely, according to a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of replacing gas in a fuel cell system, comprising the
25 steps of:

detecting that a fuel cartridge is connected to a fuel cell system comprising a fuel cell; and

supplying a fuel from the fuel cartridge on the basis of the detection to start replacement of the gas in the fuel cell system.

In the present invention, it is preferred that
5 the gas replacement is performed for a predetermined period of time.

Further, it is preferred that the gas in the fuel cell system is discharged from a purge valve provided in the fuel cell system based on the
10 detection.

Moreover, it is preferred that the replacement of the gas in the fuel cell system is performed until an output voltage of the fuel cell ~~becomes~~ reaches at least a predetermined value ~~or more~~.

15 According to a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of replacing a gas in a fuel cell system, comprising the steps of:

detecting an output voltage of a fuel cell provided in a fuel cell system; and

20 when the output voltage becomes a predetermined value or less, supplying a fuel from a fuel cartridge to start replacement of the gas in the fuel cell system.

It is preferable to perform the replacement of
25 the gas in the fuel cell system until the output voltage of the fuel cell ~~becomes~~ reaches at least a predetermined value ~~or more~~.

According to a third aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of replacing a gas in a fuel cell system, comprising the steps of:

detecting an output voltage of a fuel cell
5 provided in a fuel cell system; and

when the output voltage becomes a predetermined value or less, supplying a fuel from a fuel tank provided in the fuel cell system to start replacement of the gas in the fuel cell system.

10 It is preferable to perform the replacement of the gas in the fuel cell system until the output voltage of the fuel cell ~~becomes~~ reaches at least a predetermined value ~~or more~~.

According to a fourth aspect of the present
15 invention, there is provided a method of replacing a gas in a fuel cell system attached to a device, comprising the step of, when a switch of a device to which a fuel cell system is attached is turned on, supplying a fuel from a fuel cartridge to start
20 replacement of the gas in the fuel cell system.

It is preferred that the switch is a power source switch of the device.

According to a fifth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of replacing a
25 gas in a fuel cell system attached to a device, comprising the step of, when a switch of a device to which a fuel cell system is attached is turned on,

supplying a fuel from a fuel tank provided in the fuel cell system to start replacement of the gas in the fuel cell system.

According to a sixth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a fuel cell system, comprising:

a fuel cell;

a connecting part for connecting a fuel cartridge; and

10 a sensor for detecting that the fuel cartridge is connected to the connecting part,

wherein a fuel is supplied from the fuel cartridge connected to the connecting part on the basis of the detection by the sensor to start replacement of a gas in the fuel cell system.

According to a seventh aspect of the present invention, there is provided a fuel cell system, comprising:

a fuel cell;

20 a connecting part for connecting a fuel cartridge; and

a voltage detector for detecting an output voltage of the fuel cell,

wherein when the output voltage detected by the voltage detector becomes a first predetermined value or less, a fuel is supplied from the fuel cartridge connected to the connecting part to start replacement

of a gas in the fuel cell system.

According to an eighth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a fuel cell system, comprising:

5 a fuel cell;

a fuel tank; and

a voltage detector for detecting an output voltage of the fuel cell,

wherein when the output voltage detected by the
10 voltage detector becomes a first predetermined value or less, a fuel is supplied from the fuel tank to start replacement of a gas in the fuel cell system.

According to a ninth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a device for a fuel cell
15 system, comprising:

an attaching part for attaching a fuel cell system; and

a switch provided in the device,

wherein a fuel is supplied from a fuel
20 cartridge connected to the fuel cell system in response to ~~turn-on of~~ turning on the switch to start replacement of a gas in the fuel cell system.

According to a tenth aspect of the present invention, there is provided a device for a fuel cell
25 system, comprising:

a fuel cell system comprising a fuel cell and a connecting part for connecting a fuel cartridge; and

a switch provided in the device,
wherein a fuel is supplied from the fuel
cartridge connected to the fuel cell system in
response to ~~turn~~ turning on ~~of~~ the switch to start
5 replacement of a gas in the fuel cell system.

According to an eleventh aspect of the present
invention, there is provided a device for a fuel cell
system, comprising:

a fuel cell system comprising a fuel cell and a
10 fuel tank; and

a switch provided in the device,
wherein a fuel is supplied from the fuel tank
of the fuel cell system in response to turn-ing on ~~of~~
the switch to start replacement of a gas in the fuel
15 cell system.

With the gas replacement method of a fuel cell
system, the fuel cell system and the device for a
fuel cell system in accordance with the present
invention, it is possible to replace the gas other
20 than ~~a~~ the fuel, which has entered a fuel cell that
is supplied with the fuel from a fuel cartridge or a
fuel tank provided in the fuel cell system, with the
fuel gas more easily. Especially, the user does not
have to perform the gas replacement operation
25 manually, ~~but the~~ The gas replacement can be
automatically performed to actuate the fuel cell.

Other features and advantages of the present

invention will be apparent from the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

5 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a central sectional view of a main part of a fuel cell system for explaining a preferred embodiment of the gas replacement method of the fuel cell system in accordance with the present invention;

10 FIG. 2 is a perspective view showing the appearance of a fuel cell system and a fuel cartridge;

FIG. 3 is a perspective view showing the fuel cartridge ~~part of~~ FIG. 2;

15 FIG. 4 is a block diagram for explaining the present invention;

FIG. 5 is a ~~diagram showing a~~ flow chart explaining an operation according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

20 FIG. 6 is a ~~diagram showing a~~ flow chart explaining an operation according to a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 7 is a ~~diagram showing a~~ flow chart explaining an operation according to a preferred
25 embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 8 is a ~~diagram showing a~~ flow chart explaining an operation according to a preferred

embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 9 is a schematic perspective view showing a digital camera using the fuel cell system according to the present invention;

5 FIG. 10 is a schematic perspective view showing the rear surface and bottom surface of the digital camera of FIG. 9; and

FIG. 11 is a schematic perspective view showing the state in which the fuel cell system and fuel cell
10 cartridge of the present invention are attached to the digital camera shown in FIG. 10.

BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

The gas replacement method of a fuel cell of
15 the present invention is a method of replacing gas in a fuel cell system, which comprises detecting that a fuel cartridge is connected to a fuel cell system comprising a fuel cell and supplying a fuel from the fuel cartridge on the basis of the detection to start
20 replacement of gas in the fuel cell system.

Further, the gas replacement method of a fuel cell of the present invention is a method of replacing a gas in a fuel cell system, which comprises detecting an output voltage of a fuel cell
25 provided in a fuel cell system, and when the output voltage becomes a predetermined value or less, supplying a fuel from a fuel cartridge to start

replacement of the gas in the fuel cell system.

Moreover, the gas replacement method of a fuel cell of the present invention is a method of replacing a gas in a fuel cell system, which
5 comprises detecting an output voltage of a fuel cell provided in a fuel cell system, and when the output voltage becomes a predetermined value or less, supplying a fuel from a fuel tank provided in the fuel cell system to start replacement of the gas in
10 the fuel cell system.

Further, the gas replacement method of a fuel cell of the present invention is a method of replacing gas in a fuel cell system attached to a device, which comprises, when a switch of a device to
15 which a fuel cell system is attached is turned on, supplying a fuel from a fuel cartridge to start replacement of a gas in the fuel cell system.

Moreover, the gas replacement method of a fuel cell of the present invention is a method of
20 replacing gas in a fuel cell system attached to a device, which comprises, when a switch of a device to which a fuel cell system is attached is turned on, supplying a fuel from a fuel tank provided in the fuel cell system to start replacement of a gas in the
25 fuel cell system.

In the above-described gas replacement methods of the fuel cell in accordance with the present

invention, it is preferable to perform the replacement of the gas in the fuel cell system until the output voltage of the fuel cell of the fuel cell system ~~becomes~~ reaches at least a predetermined value
5 ~~or more~~.

In the present invention, as described above, ~~it is detected that~~ that the connection of the fuel cartridge is connected to the fuel cell system is detected, and the gas replacement operation can be
10 performed automatically. Alternatively, the output of the fuel cell is detected, and the gas replacement can be performed when a predetermined voltage is not produced. Alternatively, the gas replacement can be performed in synchronization with the turning -on of
15 a switch of a portable electronic device, for example, a personal computer, a mobile phone, a digital camera, or a digital camcorder. It is especially preferable to synchronize the gas replacement with the turning -
on of a main switch of such a portable electronic
20 device. For example, in most devices, a main switch will be a main power source switch.

Preferred embodiments of the present invention will be described with reference to the drawings.

FIG. 1 is a central sectional view showing a
25 main part of a fuel cell system and a fuel cartridge showing a preferred embodiment of the present invention. FIG. 2 is a perspective view showing ~~the~~

~~state in which~~ a fuel cell system 1 ~~and connected to~~
a fuel cartridge 2 ~~are connected to each other~~. In
this embodiment, ~~The~~ the fuel cell system 1 is
contained in a portable electronic device, for
5 example, a digital camera ~~in this embodiment~~. The
fuel cell system 1 may be constructed to be
detachable from the portable device. The fuel
cartridge 2 is capable of being inserted from ~~an~~
outside of the digital camera. FIG. 3 is a
10 perspective view showing the fuel cartridge.
Reference numeral 3 denotes a cartridge casing, ~~and~~
~~it~~ which may be filled with compressed hydrogen, or
which may have a ~~construction structure in which~~ where
a hydrogen storage alloy such as, for example, Fe-Ti
15 alloy and Ti-Mn alloy, are made to occlude hydrogen.
Reference numeral 3a denotes a cover member that will
be described in detail ~~later~~ below, and reference
numeral 4b denotes a protruding part of a valve.

In FIG. 1, reference numeral 6 denotes a casing
20 of the fuel cell system. Reference numeral and
character 6a denotes a recessed part (namely, the
recessed part 6a is a connecting part on the fuel
cell system side to which the connecting part of the
fuel cartridge is connected), into which the
25 connecting part of the fuel cartridge is inserted.
Reference numeral and character 3a denotes the cover
member, which is disposed around the protruding part

4b of a valve 4, and a protruding part thereof is larger than the protruding part 4b. A circular conical surface 4a of the valve 4 is in contact with a circular conical surface 3b of the fuel cartridge so that the fuel gas does not leak to the outside. Reference numeral 5 denotes a compression spring the ~~of which~~ right end portion of which in the drawing is fixed to a member (not shown) inside the fuel cartridge, and ~~of which~~ the left end portion of which presses a bottom surface 4c of the valve 4. Namely, hydrogen gas pressure and a force of the compression spring 5 bring the circular conical surfaces 3b and 4a into contact with each other so that the hydrogen gas does not leak to the outside the fuel cartridge.

The valve 4 and the cover member 3a in the drawing are made smaller ~~as compared with~~ than a finger of a child, ~~and are formed in such size as to prevent a finger of a~~ the child from reaching the protruding part 4b of the valve 4 in a hole 3c of the cover member.

Reference numeral and character 6a denotes the recessed part, in which a V-shaped groove 6c is formed, and an O-ring 7 as a seal member is disposed therein. Reference numeral and character 3g denotes a screw part provided at the cover member 3a.

Next, an operation will be explained based on FIG. 1.

When the fuel cartridge 2 is inserted, a chamfered portion 3e formed at a tip end portion of the cover member 3a abuts ~~to~~ the seal member 7, and the cover member 3a moves in the leftward direction
 5 in FIG. 1 while compressing the seal member 7. The seal member 7 is in close contact with an outer surface 3d of the cover member 3a to make a fuel flow path airtight.

Reference numeral and character 6d denotes a
 10 screw part provided at the recessed portion 6a. After the seal member 7 is compressed by the recessed part 6a and the cover member 3a and air-tightness of the fuel flow path is secured, the screws 3g and 6d are engaged with each other to screw the casing 3 of
 15 the fuel cartridge into the casing 6 of the fuel cell system, whereby the valve 4 and a pin 8 abut ~~to~~ each other, and the fuel cartridge 2 is further inserted into the recessed part 6a against the fuel gas pressure and the force of the compression spring 5,
 20 thus releasing the contact between the circular conical surfaces 3b and 4a and supplying ~~hydrogen~~
hydrogen gas to the fuel cell system 1 from the inside of the casing 3 of the fuel cartridge.

A surface 3f of the casing 3 of the fuel
 25 cartridge and a surface 6b of the casing 6 of the fuel cell system abut ~~to~~ each other to complete the insertion, and the fuel cell system 1 ~~and t.~~ The

fuel cartridge 2 are fixed to each other.

Reference numeral 9 denotes a diaphragm, which has a disc shape, and an outer peripheral part 9a is fixed to a casing 10 of a regulator body. The casing
 5 10 is fixed to a fixed member (not shown) inside the casing 6. The diaphragm 9 has a pin 8 fixed to a plane part 9b in the center, has a corrugated recesses and protrusions formed concentrically, has a spring characteristic, and receives hydrogen pressure
 10 at the right side in the drawing and gas pressure of the inside of the casing 10. The diaphragm 9 is freely displaceable in the left and right hand direction in the drawing in accordance with the change in the hydrogen gas pressure.

15 ~~A~~The right end portion in the drawing of the pin 8 is a spherical surface 8a, which is made to abut ~~to~~ the protruding part 4b of the valve 4. Reference numeral 11 denotes a compression spring, one end of which is fixed to the inside of the casing
 20 10 and the other end of which is fixed to a surface opposite to the pin, of the plane part 9b of the diaphragm 9 having the pin fixed thereto.

Next, an operation will be explained. When the casing 3 of the fuel cartridge is inserted, and is
 25 screwed in with the screw, parts 3g and 6d are engaged with each other, ~~and the~~ surfaces 3f and 6b abut ~~to~~ each other, and the hydrogen gas pressure

inside the fuel cartridge and the compression spring 5 exert a force in the leftward direction in the drawing. The gas pressure inside the casing 10 of the diaphragm and the compression spring 11 exert a force in the rightward direction in the drawing. The gas pressure inside the casing 6 of the fuel cell system exerts a force in the leftward direction in the drawing to the diaphragm 9. The resultant force of these forces determines the positions of the pin 8 and the valve 4. Namely, when the hydrogen gas pressure inside the casing 6 of the fuel cell system is at a predetermined value, the circular conical surface 4a of the valve 4 and the circular conical surface 3b of the fuel cartridge abut ~~to~~ each other and a flow of the hydrogen gas into the fuel cell system side from the fuel cartridge side is stopped.

When the hydrogen gas is consumed during the power generation of the fuel cell reaction, the hydrogen gas pressure inside the casing 6 of the fuel cell system ~~reduces~~decreases, so that the diaphragm 9 is displaced in the rightward direction in the drawing. As a result, the pin 8 presses the valve 4 in the rightward direction in the drawing to displace it, whereby the contact of the circular conical surfaces 4a and 3b is released, and the hydrogen gas inside the casing 3 of the fuel cartridge flows into the fuel cell system side.

As explained above, the outer peripheral part of the diaphragm is fixed to the casing 10 of the regulator and is therefore not ~~given the~~ influenced by the ambient air pressure. Accordingly, by
 5 properly setting the gas pressure inside the casing 10 of the regulator and the force of the compression spring 11, a desired hydrogen gas pressure can be maintained. Alternatively, without using the compression spring shown in this embodiment, by only
 10 setting the gas pressure inside the casing 10 of the regulator suitably, it is possible to obtain the desired hydrogen gas pressure.

Reference numeral 12 denotes a sensor for detecting ~~that if~~ the fuel cartridge is connected to
 15 the connecting part of the fuel cell system ~~side~~. In this example, reference numeral 12 denotes a micro switch, ~~and which~~ is disposed so as to be turned on just before the fuel cartridge is fixed to the fuel cell system. Reference numeral 13 denotes a purge
 20 valve that performs the gas replacement, and a circular conical surface 13a thereof abuts ~~to a~~ circular conical surface 6e formed at the casing 6 of the fuel cell system. Reference numeral 14 denotes a compression spring, which biases the purge valve 13
 25 in the upward direction in the drawing. The compression spring 14 always keeps the circular conical surfaces 13a and 6e in contact with each

other, so that the gas inside the fuel cell system does not leak to the outside. Reference numeral 15 is an electromagnet. By energizing two lead wires 15b, a plunger 15a displaces in the downward
5 direction in the drawing against the force of the compression spring 14 to release the contact between the circular conical surfaces 13a and 6e so that the gas inside the fuel cell system flows to the outside.

FIG. 4 is a block diagram according to the
10 present invention.

In the figure, reference numeral 12 denotes the switch shown in FIG. 1, and reference numeral 15 denotes the electromagnet shown in FIG. 1. Reference numeral 16 is a microcomputer as a control means
15 inside a device where the fuel cell system body is disposed, ~~i.~~ In this embodiment, the device is a digital camera, and reference numeral 17 denotes ~~a~~ the main switch of the digital camera. Reference numeral 18 denotes ~~a~~ the power source in the digital
20 camera, which is used for actuation or the like of the fuel cell. Reference numeral 19 denotes a fuel cell output voltage detecting part.

Next, ~~an~~ the operation will be explained. As is seen from FIG. 1, when the fuel cartridge is
25 attached, the ambient air enters from the hole 6a of the casing 6 of the fuel cell system. In this state, the reaction of the fuel cell does not advance. Just

before ~~completion of~~ completing the attaching the fuel cartridge, the switch 12 is turned on, and the signal is inputted into the microcomputer 16. The microcomputer 16 energizes the electromagnet 15 for a
 5 predetermined period of time to open the purge valve 13, whereby the gas inside the fuel cell system is discharged to the outside and the pressure inside the fuel cell system ~~lowers~~ decreases. Thus, ~~and~~
~~therefore~~ the fuel gas is supplied from the fuel
 10 cartridge, as a result of which, the gas inside the fuel cell system is replaced with the fuel gas. In this case, the point to be noted is that unless the gas pressure inside the fuel cell system is higher than the atmospheric pressure, the replacement of the
 15 gas will not occur, and the ambient air will enter the system instead. Accordingly, in this embodiment, the gas pressure inside the fuel cell system ~~has~~
~~to must~~ be ~~necessarily set to be~~ higher than the atmospheric pressure.

20 Instead of purging the gas inside the fuel cell system to the atmosphere by the purge valve, the gas may be recovered by a recovering tank, for example.

FIG. 5 is a flow chart for explaining the operation, which is discussed below.

25 ~~Explanation will be made based on this flow chart.~~

Even when the main switch 17 of the digital

camera of FIG. 4 is in the OFF state, the microcomputer 16 operates and performs the detection of attachment/detachment of the fuel cartridge.

The microcomputer 16 detects the state of the switch 12 (101), ~~and i.~~ If the switch is in the ON state, the microcomputer 16 performs the loop and continues the detection of the switch 12.

When the microcomputer 16 detects ~~OFF of that~~ the switch 12 (101) is in the OFF state, it performs the loop and continues the detection until the switch 12 is turned ON (102). Because turning -on of-the switch 12 means that the fuel cartridge is attached, the program jumps to the next step, where the electromagnet is energized for a predetermined period of time (103) to replace the gas.

Accordingly, without a special operation of the user, the gas replacement is automatically performed. Next, the program returns to the start, and the above operation is repeated.

FIG. 6 is a flow chart for explaining another embodiment.

In this embodiment, the operation of the fuel cell output detection part 19 shown in FIG. 4 is added to the flow chart shown in FIG. 5. After the program proceeds to the step 103 in the flow chart in FIG. 5, the fuel cell output voltage detection part 19 detects the voltage (104), ~~and w.~~ When the

voltage is less than a predetermined value, it is determined that the gas replacement is insufficient and the program returns to the step 103, where the electromagnet 15 is energized for the predetermined
 5 period of time, the purge valve opens, and the gas replacement is performed. When it is determined that the voltage is the predetermined value or more (104), the series of operation is finished and the program returns to the start, and the operation of the flow
 10 chart is continued.

The operation of the above flow charts in FIGS. 5 and 6 can be performed only when the digital camera main switch 17 is in the ON state. In this case, consumption of the power source 18 in the digital
 15 camera can be reduced.

Next, still another embodiment will be explained. A digital camera involved in this embodiment detects the voltage in the fuel cell output voltage detection part 19 when the main switch
 20 17 is in the ON state, ~~and when.~~ When the voltage becomes a first value or less, ~~it opens~~ the purge valve 13 is opened for a predetermined period of time ~~and to performs the~~ gas replacement.

Alternatively, until the voltage detected in
 25 the fuel cell output voltage detection part 19 becomes a second predetermined value or more, the purge valve 13 is opened.

The first predetermined value and the second predetermined value may be properly determined depending on the characteristics of the fuel cell, and may be set at different values or the same value
 5 depending on the characteristics.

~~FIG. 7 is a flow chart for explanation.~~ The explanation ~~will be made based on this~~ may be found in the flow chart in FIG. 7. At the time of operation of a digital camera, the fuel cell output voltage
 10 detection part 19 detects the voltage at all times or at predetermined time intervals, and determines whether the voltage is less than the predetermined value (201). When the voltage is the predetermined value or more, the voltage detection is continued.
 15 When the voltage is less than the predetermined value, the program jumps to the next step, and the electromagnet 15 is energized for a predetermined period of time (202), whereby the purge valve 13 is opened and gas replacement is performed. Thereafter,
 20 the fuel cell output voltage detection part 19 detects the voltage and determines whether the voltage is ~~not less than~~ at least the predetermined value (203). When the voltage does not reach the predetermined value, the gas replacement is
 25 insufficient, and the program returns to step (202), where the electromagnet 15 is energized for the predetermined period of time and the gas replacement

is performed. Thereafter, it is determined whether the voltage is ~~not less than~~at least the predetermined value (203), and when the voltage is the predetermined value or more, the program returns
 5 to the start, and the same procedure is repeated.

Accordingly, ~~it is possible to a stable operate-~~
~~operation of the fuel cell is possible stably without~~
~~any special operation of attention from the user.~~

Next, still another embodiment will be
 10 explained. In this embodiment, whenever the main switch 17 of the digital camera is turned ON, the electromagnet 15 is energized for a predetermined period of time, whereby the purge valve 13 is opened and the gas replacement is performed.

15 FIG. 8 is a flow chart for ~~explanation~~explaining this process. ~~The explanation will be made based on this flow chart.~~ When the digital camera main switch 17 is turned ON (301), the electromagnet 15 is energized for a predetermined
 20 period of time (302) and the purge valve 13 is opened, whereby the gas replacement is performed. Thereafter, the fuel cell output voltage detection part 19 detects the voltage and determines whether the voltage is ~~not less~~at least ~~than~~ the predetermined
 25 value (303). When the voltage is less than the predetermined value, the gas replacement is insufficient, and therefore, the program returns to

step (302), where the electromagnet 15 is energized for the predetermined period of time, and gas replacement is performed. Thereafter, it is determined whether the voltage is ~~not less than~~at least the predetermined value (303), and when the voltage is the predetermined value or more, the procedure is finished.

According to this embodiment, without the awareness of the user, the fuel cell ~~is normally operated~~
operates in a normal manner. In this embodiment, detection of the fuel cell output voltage may not be necessarily performed, and the electromagnet 15 may be only energized for the predetermined time.

FIG. 9 is a perspective view showing a digital camera as one example of a device using the fuel cell system according to the present invention. In the figure, reference numeral 91 denotes a camera body, reference numeral 92 denotes a ~~taking~~ lens, and reference numeral 93 denotes a main switch, which is linked to the digital camera switch 17 shown FIG. 4.

FIG. 10 is a schematic perspective view showing the rear and bottom surfaces of the digital camera shown in FIG. 9. FIG. 11 is a schematic view showing a state in which the fuel cell system and the fuel cell cartridge of the present invention are attached to the digital camera shown in FIG. 10. Reference

numeral 95 denotes a lid of an attaching part 96, and
 reference numeral 96 denotes the attaching part (also
 referred to as "cell housing chamber") for housing
 the fuel cell system, reference numeral 97 denotes an
 5 operation switch for operating the digital camera,
 and reference numeral 98 is a liquid crystal screen
 for a view finder of the digital camera, and for
 reviewing ~~taken~~-captured images, and the like.

In this embodiment, as the switch which is
 10 synchronized with the gas replacement operation, the
 main switch 93 is ~~taken~~-used as an example. However,
~~but in the~~with respect ~~that~~to the gas replacement ~~of~~
in the fuel cell system ~~is~~-operated on the side of
~~the a device,~~ such as a digital camera, the operation
 15 switch 97 other than the main switch 93 may be used.
 Namely, the gas replacement may be controlled by the
 operation of the operation switch 97 on the device
 side. Of course, when the main switch, such as the
power source switch of the device, is synchronized
 20 with the gas replacement, the replacement can be
 performed more easily because the main switch is the
 first switch to be operated when the device is used
 in many cases. Namely, ~~in the respect that~~ if the
 user does not need to perform the gas replacement
 25 operation manually, gas replacement can be
 automatically performed and the fuel cell can be
 actuated, it is preferable that the switch

synchronized with the gas replacement operation ~~is be~~
~~made~~ the main switch.

In this example, the case of the fuel cartridge
type is explained. However, but instead of the fuel
5 cartridge, the present invention can suitably be
applied to the case in which the fuel cell system is
provided integrally with a fuel tank. Namely, the
gas replacement may be performed depending on the
output voltage of the fuel cell, or the gas
10 replacement may be performed corresponding to ~~turn-on~~
~~of~~ the switch on the device side being turned "on"
(especially, the main switch).

In this embodiment, the case of using the
microcomputer provided in the digital camera as the
15 control means for gas replacement has been explained,
but the control means may be provided on the fuel
cell system side and the gas replacement may be
controlled by this control means.

20 Industrial Applicability

With the gas replacement method of a fuel cell,
the fuel cell system and the device for the fuel cell
system, it is possible to more easily replace gas
other than the fuel, which enters the fuel cell that
25 is supplied with the fuel from a fuel cartridge or a
fuel tank provided in the fuel cell system, with the
fuel gas. Especially, the user does not need to

perform the gas replacement operation manually, ~~the~~ the _____
The gas replacement is performed automatically and
the fuel cell can be actuated. The present invention
can be applied to a fuel cell system used ~~for~~ in
5 automobiles, portable electronic devices, such as
notebook computers, mobile phones and digital
camcorders.

This application claims priority from Japanese
10 Patent Application No. 2003-402841, filed December 2,
2003, which is hereby incorporated by reference
herein.

ABSTRACT

A method of replacing a gas in a fuel cell system is provided, which comprises the steps of
5 detecting that a fuel cartridge is connected to the fuel cell system having a fuel cell and supplying a fuel from the fuel cartridge on the basis of the detection to start replacement of gas in the fuel cell system. Thereby, a simple gas replacement
10 method is provided ~~which replaces~~ for replacing the gas other than the fuel, which has entered the fuel cell system that is supplied with the fuel from the fuel cartridge, with the fuel. Especially, a user does not have to perform the gas replacement
15 operation manually, ~~but t.~~ The gas replacement can be automatically ~~be~~ performed.